

CHAPTER III

THE CALENDAR OF THE EGYPTIAN FARMER

§ I. *The Rise and Fall of the Nile*

in Egypt IF the Egyptian farmer of the olden time could thus get no help, except at the rarest intervals, from the official or sacer- husbandry dotal calendar, he must have been compelled to observe for himself those natural signals which marked the times for the various operations of husbandry. In all ages of which we possess any records the Egyptians have been an agricultural people, dependent for their subsistence on the growth of the corn. The cereals which they cultivated were wheat, barley, and apparently sorghum (*Holcus sorghum*, Linnaeus), the *doora* of the modern fellaheen.¹ Then as now the whole country, with the exception of a fringe on the coast of the Mediterranean, was almost rainless, and owed its immense fertility entirely to the annual inundation of the Nile, which, regulated by an elaborate system of dams and canals, was distributed over the fields, renewing the soil year by year with a fresh deposit of mud washed down from the great equatorial lakes and the mountains of Abyssinia. Hence the rise of the river has always been watched by the inhabitants with the utmost anxiety ; for if it either falls short of or exceeds a certain height, dearth and famine are the inevitable consequences.² The water begins to rise early In

¹ Herodotus, ii. 36, with A. Wiedemann's note; Diodorus Siculus, i. 14. *dolle*, *Origin of Cultivated Plants*, i. 17. *i*; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* v. 57 (London, 1884), pp. 354 sq., 369, sq., xviii. 60; Sir J. Gardiner Wilkin-381; G. Maspero,

Histoire anrieune
son, *Manners and Customs of the des Peuples de P*
Orient Classique, i. 66.
Ancient Egyptians (London, 1878), ² Herodotus, ii.
14; Diodorus
ii. 398, 399, 418, 426 *sq.*; A. Erman, *Siculus*, i. 36 ; Strabo,
xvii. i. 3, pp.
Aegypten und aegyptisches Leben im 786-788; Pliny, *Nat.*
Hist, xviii. 167-